Rural Poems

by
Gershom
Wiborn

Genesee Valley Historical Reprint Series

Genesee Valley Historical Reprint Series: Rural Poems

This slim little volume of eight poems by Gershom Wiborn of Victor, NY, bears no imprint regarding publisher or place—just a date (1886), which seems to be long after at least some of the verses were penned . A couple of the poems had been previously published in the *Pontiac Jacksonian* and *Street and Smith's Weekly* (to give a clue about their intended audience).

Why *Rural Poems*? In several, one can hear the longing in Wiborn's voice for the agrarian life of yore, before the great American forests were felled, before the natives were pushed out. In the poem, "The Aged Indian of the Genesee," the speaker compares the white man to a vine that overtook the "tall, rugged pine" that was the Indian nation. "'Where's our rich hunting grounds?' When this query we've press'd, / The white man has answered, and re-answered 'West.'"

The author seems of two minds regarding the progress of the age, celebrating and lamenting it by turns. "Modern Inventions" is a wide-eyed paean to the marvels of steam transportation, yet Wiborn manages to put this human accomplishment in its place beside the once-wondrous inventions of the ancients.

The value of *Rural Poems* lies in its strength as a primary source, embodying contemporary reflection on a transitional period in our nation's history. In these poems, Wiborn attempts to link his age with past ages, declaring that there's nothing new, really, under the sun. Human endeavor, war (three of the eight poems deal with American Civil War, still being fought at time of their writing), and invention are as much a part of Nature as is the physical world – a world he seems to love deeply.

The Genesee Valley Historical Reprint Series is an effort of Milne Library, SUNY Geneseo.

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By GERSHOM WIBORN.

1886.

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RURAL POEMS.

By GERSHOM WIBORN.

THE AGED INDIAN OF THE GENESEE.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

Those beautiful forests so grand and so fine,
Where once grew the maple, the oak, and the pine,
Those old ancient forests, ah! where are they now?
All cleared for the reaper, the scythe, and the plow:
Our old ancient forests are all cleared away,
And nothing but cities and towns where they lay.

Our old hunting grounds, where we chased the wild deer,
And the war whoop once sounded so shrill, and so clear—
Those fine hunting forests are all cleared and fell,
The game is now scarce, where it once throve so well
"Where's our rich hunting grounds?" When this query
we've press'd,
The white man has answered, and re-answered "West."

Our dear sacred grounds where our dead fathers lay,
And where wild savage tribes would in peace let them stay,
Those grounds are now plowed 'mid our dead fathers' bones,
And their old relicts sought for, in spite of their moans,
To remember those grounds, we have no need of arts,
Their pictures are graven to well on our hearts.

Our old warrior-hunters so brave, and so strong,
They would charge to the teeth on a whole battle throng;
Those old warrior-hunters now youthful they stand,
Where the game is so rich in that bright, spirit land.
Oh, 'tis pleasure to muse on a subject so fair,
For soon we shall go hence, and hunt with them there.

Those beautiful lakes like a mirror so clear,
There we'd fish, and we'd hunt for the whole happy year;
On their white, sandy shores, our wigwams have stood,
And there dwelt our children so happy and good.
On those beautiful lakes shall our barks never glide—
The steam horse has found them, and there let them ride.

Our nations once stood like the tall, rugged pine,
The white man then seemed like the low, shaded vine;
The vine now is failing, his strength is near done,
The vine now is strong, it has reached to the sun.
And the vine now should nourish that old ancient pine,
For the Great Spirit rules and his laws are divine.

MODERN INVENTIONS.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

(*Original.*)

In ancient times how strange 'twould seem
To see great navies moved by steam,
And steam alone;
And yet in all earth's former ages,
Amidst her seers and ancient sages,
Was that unknown.

Old Aristotle nature's laws
He searched to find effect and cause,
But did not dream
That down in future ages far,
And west, beyond that setting star,
They'd sail by steam.

The Persian monarch, in his zeal
To Haman's bloody laws repeal,
Sent swiftest steeds;
But now when need or haste requires,
'Tis but to charge the electric wires,
And space recedes.

And steamers now of latest form
Are proof against the leaden storm,
And can defy
The mighty, massive mortar's lead
That glides above her slanting head,
And wards them by.

Old Babylon, with towering walls,
And massive gates and waterfalls,
How grand she'd seem!
To see great bridges span her steep,
And tunnels 'neath her rivers deep
For trains to steam.

One age again, and like the past,
And with inventions made as fast,
And all will see
The truth of what old poets sung,
That men and genii were but one,
And one should be.

AUTUMN IN RURAL LIFE.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

(Written for Street and Smith's Weekly.)

The night was dark, and o'er the plain,
Descending, blew the sleety rain;
The wind in gusts blew fearful by,
And darkness veiled the dreary sky.
Now wealth was sunk in drowsy beds,
And want had sought its dreary sheds,
Whilst tired and lone by weary light,
The minstrel sang the "Autumn's Night."

Ah! when those gay, those lovely flowers,
That blossomed so sweet in youthful bowers,
On summer's day,
Cold autumn's frosts and chilling showers
Bore them away.

The bird that sang her cheerful lays,
And cheered our toil through sultry days
Whole summer long,
In warmer climes our winter stays
And lends her song.

The fine old tree, beneath its shade
How oft at sultry noon I staid
And cooled my brows,
How bare these autumn frosts have made
Its leafless boughs.

The herds so playful and so grand,
That grazed at will o'er verdant land
Just closed with walls,
Now shivering in the yards they stand,
Or closed in stalls.

The fields and groves where oft we'd stray
At close of summer's toilsome day,
When sun was low,
How drear those flowery fields now lie
In trackless snow.

Now wintry seasons, sad and sear,
Serve well their purpose in the year;
They're well employed,
To make the sunny seasons dear
And more enjoyed.

And so in life—the youth that's spent
Like wintry life by labor bent,
We may engage;
His manhood is with life content,
And after age.

Then let the storms of autumn blow,
And drive the sleet, the rain, the snow,
We'll not repine;
There's pleasure yet for us, we know,
In winter's time.

And so, when rich in garner'd store,
And fruits the last blest season bore,
Ah! where's the heart
'Twould grudge the pained, the laboring poor
Their needful part?

THE HORRORS AND UNCERTAINTY OF CIVIL WAR.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

(*For the Pontiac Jacksonian.*)

The direst ills that man can dread
Are plagues, and wars, and lack of bread;
And, heaven be praised, no plague is near
But war—oh war—how came it here!
Yes, war, that withering, burning scourge—
What can we for its presence urge?
What but to blot, destroy, deface,
All rank but with the colored race.

Now Anties pause to deadly strife,
To nations conflict, who has bid her?
And who has caused this section strife?
Its growth for years now pray consider.
And was it not yourselves that led it,
And kindly nursed and fondly fed it,
'Till raised above dull splitting fence,
You've piles of greenbacks to dispense

And though among the present age,
Are dark fanatics who engage
To bless your plan,
Still on the future's trusty sheet
The world will you this verdict mete:
"A hellish clan."

But oh! when shall our warring cease,
And peace shine gently o'er us?
'Tis not till we shall long for peace,
And canvass terms before us;
For long may war in vain pursue it;
But *compromise*, how soon 'twould do it.

And now though conquest be the aim,
We may be conquer'd at the game;
For Carthage once, so fierce and grand,
She'd almost swept the Roman's land,
But still for Fabius fortune turned—
And Carthage in her ruins burned.
Napoleon first, with mighty sway,
Dethroned old kings and monarchs gray;
All Europe shook at power unbound,
And each his brothers too he crowned,
But still when fortune ceased to smile,
He died on lone Helena's Isle.
And now although we're sure invading,
Our credit's sunk and armies fading.
Old France and Carthage in their fate
May stare us in the face too late.

THE CHICAGO PLATFORM AND THE UNION.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

Old Rome, when sunk and like us now,
Called Cincinnatus from his plow,
And 'twas his skill alone could save
His country from her yawning grave.

And now McClellan, warrior great,
With thee we trust the Union's fate,
And on the verge of ruin toss'd,
We're *with* thee saved, *without* thee lost.

For we by wild delusions torn,
And into bloody factions borne,
We need some lofty genius here,
Some Pendleton, from faction clear.

Jeff. Davis' wild, deluded throng,
And Lincoln's negro faction, strong,
To quell such wild sedition now,
Needs Cincinnatus from his plow.

In pagan's wild and bloody state,
There hate begets its kindred hate,
While compromise—pure statesman's plan—
Will ever yet reclaim its man.

At Baltimore the platform strives
To waste another million's lives;
While tax on tax, on state, on town,
Shall wear and tear the poor man down.

But at Chicago, for the track,
Our platform's Peace and Little Mac;
And then for *peace* we'll find him right,
But if 'tis *war*, still he can fight.

THE YOUNG SOLDIER AWAY.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

(*Original.*)

Our dear, loving Charlie has gone from us now,
He has left his white cottage, his babe, and his plow;
And although Hattie laughs in her cradle at play,
She only reminds me that he is away.

His portrait hangs up, and so gay on the wall,
With his steel-buttoned coat, and his sword, cap and all;
And his tall, gallant form to his sword gives display—
But, oh, I am lonely when he is away.

There are Davis and Lee, and there Bragg and their crew,
And our Union they'd rend it and cleave it in two;
But Charles is for Union, though cost what it may,
And from home, wife, and cottage, it calls him away.

During each bloody fight I have quaked in my fear,
For I knew in his heart he would long to be there;
And although they have sung him in fame's gallant lay
My heart still has languished, for he was away.

We've McClellan, and Sigel, and Hooker, and all,
And although he may rival, yet still he may fall;
And although fame and glory may now be his pay,
Their glare shines but dimly, for he's far away.

But now this dark war—oh, when shall it cease,
And all mustered home to their friends and in peace?
Then Hattie will kiss him, and smiling she'll say,
"Ma is weeping for gladness, for pa's not away."

A LETTER.

VICTOR, Nov. 29th, 1856.

DEAR COUSIN :—

To you all we send
A hearty welcome "greeting,"
Accept it kindly to yourself ;
Yourself and Mister Sweeting.
Your own dear self, when we there,
Your health seemed sunk and waneing.
Please, say in verse or else in prose,
If soundness you're regaining.

One thing in sadness I deplore,
Though 'twas my own creating :
Too much of our short call we spent
In politics debating.

Poor Uncle's health, when we were there,
His frame seemed pained and aching,
He seemed to suffer from the jaunt
That he had just been taking.
When Kate and I had made our calls,
She seemed to be delighted ;
She thinks the Breeds are something smart,
And not at all benighted ;
She says, "next summer, if we're spared,
And plans are not defeated,
Our calls in Manlius on our friends
Must surely be repeated."

Our things at home : we found them safe,
For nothing had annoyed them ;
And for our friends, we told them yarns
That for a while employed them.

One joke the boys have got on me,
From which I don't recover,
I lost the train that Kate was on,
And came up on another.

Now cousin, you will surely write,
Don't wait for too much leisure.
I pen this note at *your* request,
I write it, too, with pleasure.

P. S.:— One thing I most forgot to write
And mention in my letter:
My brother, John, has been quite sick,
Though now he's something better.

The snow has fallen o'er the plain,
The out-door aspect's dreary;
Kate sits up knitting by the fire,
While Willie's nodding weary.

My sister Lydia sends her love
To all her Manlius cousins,
Each name I can't come at in verse,
Nor lump them off in dozens.

And here I think I'll write your verse,
You'll find them no great treasure,
I'll with the subject change the style
And slightly change the measure.

GERSHOM WIBORN.

To Mrs. Lydia Sweeting, Manlius Station.

THE FALLS OF NIAGARA.

BY GERSHOM WIBORN.

Where huge old Erie's boundless store
Of waste-wild waters over-power,
With thundering sound and rumbling roar,
High o'er its falls ;
There Neptune sat above its sphere,
And sang the falls :
Roll on dread torrent, let thy roar
Sound far o'er hill, o'er dell and moor,
Thy wondrous power can far out-span
The grandest works and arts of man.
The works of man are spoiled by age,
Or sunk by wars devouring rage ;
But spite of time's destroying shocks
Thou beats with foam these cragged rocks.
Oh ! that those bards, and ancient seers
That sang in old far distant years,
Had heard thy deep dread thunder loud
And seen thy bow and misty cloud.
Old *Job* would his deep speeches bring,
And *Homer* o'er thy grandeur sing ;
But when those ancient worthies shone,
Thou thundered in these wilds alone.
Thy bow whole ages stood alone,
To tutored man unseen, unknown.

Thus sang old Neptune, then with ease
He soared aloft oe'r towering trees
Through softest air
To his own native realm, the seas,
And revels there.

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